



Dear aged care providers

The Commission recently published its first report for providers exploring the complaints we receive about aged care services: [Complaints about aged care services – Insights for providers](#).

This report uses information we collect and provides key insights from the complaints we manage and resolve each year. The first part of the report provides an overview of the complaints we received about residential and home services between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023. The second part uses case studies and guided questions to help you and your staff assess your own complaints handling processes using an approach aimed at driving continuous improvement.

The Aged Care Quality Standards identify feedback and complaints requirements in Standard 6. As Approved Providers, you would be aware of the legislative requirement under the **Aged Care Act 1997** and the [Aged Care Quality Standards](#) (Quality Standards) for every service to have an internal complaints resolution process.

[Standard 6 of the Quality Standards](#) makes clear that people receiving aged care have a right to feel safe and be supported to give feedback and make complaints. It also states that providers must take appropriate action to respond to complaints.

To meet the requirements of Standard 6 and foster a continuous improvement culture that is driven by constructive responses to internal feedback and complaints, the Commission recommends that providers have in place systems and processes to:

1. **Encourage feedback:** A positive complaints culture can include establishing a [consumer advisory body](#) using other committees and forums for regular and ongoing feedback, and encouraging informal feedback through initiatives such as having a suggestion box. A consumer advisory body can provide valuable feedback to your governing body about the quality of the care and services and give people receiving care a voice.

Providers must formally communicate with people using their services at least every 12 months to offer to initiate or adjust consumer advisory body arrangements. This makes sure that any changes in the care and services provided or the advisory body membership or needs of members, are considered and addressed at least once a year. The governing body of the service must consider all feedback provided by the consumer advisory body when making decisions about the quality of care that the service provides. The governing body also needs to explain to the advisory body how it considered their feedback.

2. **Resolve concerns early:** Actively listen and act quickly to resolve concerns when they come up. Empowering staff who provide care to take action to resolve concerns when they are first raised is often the most efficient and effective way to manage complaints and it promotes better outcomes for people receiving care and for providers.
3. **Communicate and practise open disclosure:** Good communication and open disclosure can prevent minor issues from becoming more serious. When done well, the benefits of open disclosure can build trust and drive cultural change promoting continuous learning and service improvement in partnership with people receiving care. Open disclosure includes:
  - communicating with a person receiving care when things go wrong
  - listening to the care recipient's experience ensuring that their immediate needs are addressed
  - apologising and explaining the steps that the service has taken to stop it from happening again.
4. **Involve complainants:** A recurring theme within our case studies is that the person receiving care influences how their concerns are resolved. The complainant, either the person receiving care or someone who represents them, should be involved in the process to resolve the complaint.
5. **Use feedback to make continuous improvements:** A service with a positive complaints culture will encourage feedback and use it to improve their services. A well-managed and transparent complaint and feedback process builds trust and confidence.

We intend to publish these reports at least annually. We encourage you to use the case studies and guiding question in your service to help drive continuous improvement.

More information and guidance on complaints handling is available in our [Better practice guide to complaints handling in aged care services](#).

Yours sincerely

*J. M. Anderson*

*L. Macleod*

Janet Anderson PSM  
**Commissioner**

20 November 2023

Louise Macleod  
**Complaints Commissioner**

20 November 2023